

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 1, 2019

The Honorable Michael F. Doyle, Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
306 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert E. Latta,
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
2467 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden,
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Doyle, Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Latta, and Ranking Member Walden,

We write to request that the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hold a hearing on the role of telecommunications in public safety. The human impacts of natural disasters are often worsened when our telecommunications infrastructure isn't resilient to the damage caused by disasters, which is an issue California is currently facing as it battles the Kincade Fire in Sonoma County and numerous fires in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, including the Getty, Saddleridge, Tick, and Easy Fires.

As you know so well, our telecommunications infrastructure is critical for how public safety officials respond to wildfires, hurricanes, tornados, and so many other natural disasters. In California, our telecommunications infrastructure has failed many times when the public and public safety officials needed it most. Here are a few recent examples:

- In October 2017, Napa County residents faced issues receiving evacuation orders as 77 cell towers were destroyed or damaged and public safety officials faced challenges with an emergency alert system during the Atlas Peak, Tubbs, and Partrick Fires.¹
- Many Californians did not receive evacuation orders and could not download updated fire maps during the Camp Fire last year, the deadliest recorded fire in state history, because fiberoptic cables connecting cell towers melted.²
- Last year during the Mendocino Complex Fire, the largest recorded fire in California's history, an internet service provider throttled the data speeds of the Santa Clara County's firefighters, significantly undermining department personnel's ability to respond to the fire.³

As we write to you, the Kincade Fire and several other fires are burning nearly 100,000 acres of California. The Pacific Gas and Electric Company began cutting off electricity in parts of Northern California recently, including many of the communities in the congressional districts we represent. During these shutdowns, many residents realized that their landlines are voice-over-internet-protocol connections that are not operational when the power is out and that cell towers are often also solely dependent on local power supplies. On October 28th, 874 cell towers were

down in California, 702 of which were out due to power issues.⁴ Wireless carriers and others have made efforts to aid in response to the emergencies, but our Subcommittee should hear about how all stakeholders have responded and potential actions Congress can take to improve network resiliency during natural disasters.

While wildfires and earthquakes are an ever-present risk in our state, other states face tornados, hurricanes, and other disasters that legislation can be flexible in considering. The following bills should be among the items examined by the Subcommittee in any public safety hearing:

- H.R. 3836, the *Wireless Infrastructure Resiliency during Emergencies and Disasters (WIRED) Act*, introduced by Rep. Anna G. Eshoo, gives states the flexibility and authority to require wireless companies to deploy hardened infrastructure so that wireless networks are more resilient to disasters.
- H.R. 1289, the *Preserving Home and Office Numbers in Emergencies (PHONE) Act of 2019*, introduced by Rep. Mike Thompson, helps victims of disasters whose landlines are disconnected by providing a temporary hold on telephone number reassignment after a federally-declared major disaster.
- H.R. 4856, the *Reliable Emergency Alert Distribution Improvement (READI) Act of 2019*, introduced by Rep. Jerry McNerney, ensures more people receive critical emergency alerts on their mobile phones, TVs, and radios, and begins paving the way for examining the feasibility of issuing alerts through audio and video streaming services.

For all of these reasons, we ask that the Subcommittee hold a hearing to discuss the role of our telecommunications infrastructure during natural disasters, while ensuring that this hearing doesn't hinder the efforts of California public safety officials.

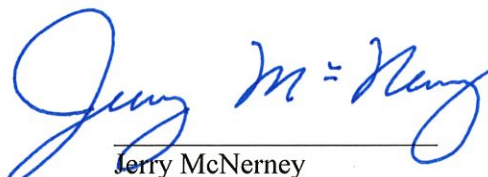
Most gratefully,




Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



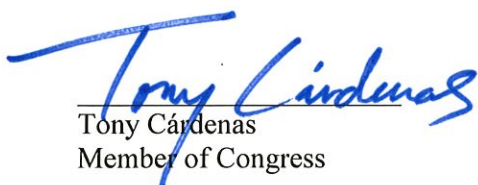
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



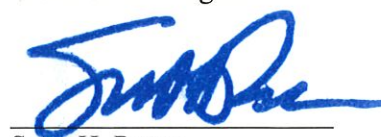
Jerry McNerney
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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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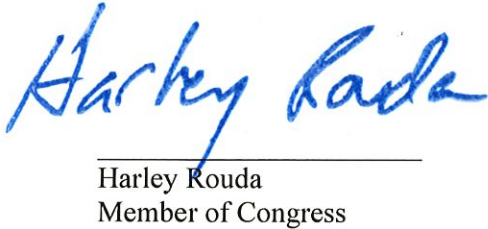

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress


Jackie Speier
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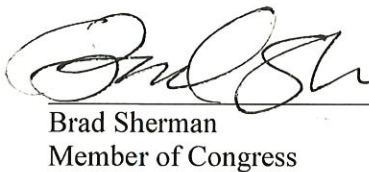

Grace F. Napolitano
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Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

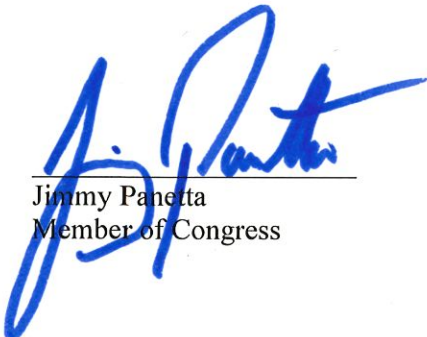

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

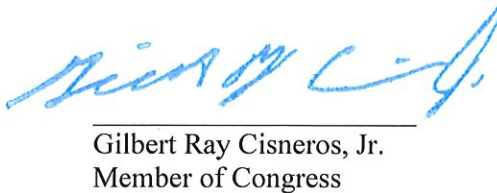

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress

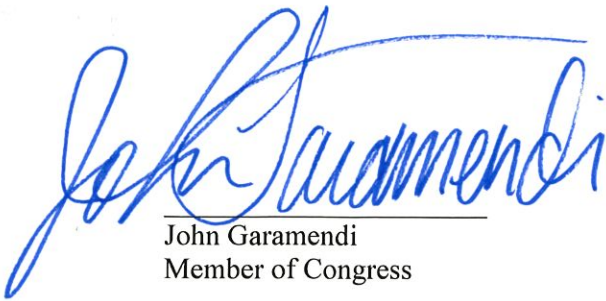

Ted W. Lieu
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Katie Porter
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Jimmy Panetta
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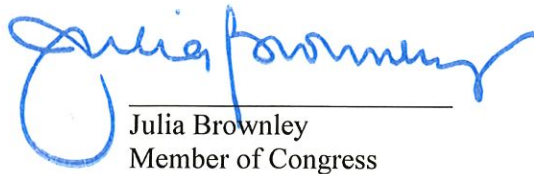

Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
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Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

¹ Paige St. John et al., "Desperate Calls to Save Those Trapped by Fire, but Emergency Alert System Failed Many," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-napa-fire-distress-calls-20171011-story.html>.

² Bob Moffitt, "Many Residents Did Not Receive Emergency Alerts During The Camp Fire. Will You Be Warned If A Disaster Is Heading Your Way?," *Capital Public Radio*, July 11, 2019, <http://www.capradio.org/136176>.

³ Jon Brodtkin, "Verizon Throttled Fire Department's 'Unlimited' Data during Calif. Wildfire," *Ars Technica*, August 21, 2018, <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2018/08/verizon-throttled-fire-departments-unlimited-data-during-calif-wildfire/>.

⁴ "Communications Status Report for Areas Impacted by California Public Safety Power Shutoffs" (Federal Communications Commission, October 28, 2019), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-360482A1.pdf>.